



# IS THE DEATH PENALTY EVER MORAL?

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There are almost no issues where I don't understand both sides: taxation, the size of government, abortion, socialism, capitalism. As strongly as I feel about any issue, I understand the opposition.

But there is an exception: the death penalty for murder. Here, the gulf is unbridgeable between those of us who believe that some murderers – and I emphasize some murderers – should be put to death and those who believe that no murderer should ever be put to death.

Take this example:

On the afternoon of July 23, 2007, in the town of Cheshire, Connecticut, two men broke into the home of Dr. William Petit, his wife Jennifer and his two daughters. The men beat Dr. Petit nearly to death with a baseball bat; one of the men raped the doctor's wife; and the other man sexually assaulted their 11 year-old daughter, Michaela. The two men then strangled Mrs. Petit to death, tied down the two daughters on beds, doused them with gasoline, and, while the girls were still alive, set the house on fire. Dr. Petit survived, but his wife and daughters did not.

Those opposed to capital punishment believe that these two men have a right to keep their lives. So, is there anything a person can do to deserve the death penalty? To those opposed to capital punishment, the answer is no. In fact, many opponents of capital punishment believe that killing murderers is the same as murder. You heard me right – most opponents equate the murder of an innocent family with putting the murderers of that family to death.

Opponents of capital punishment also argue that keeping all murderers alive sanctifies the value of human life. But the opposite is true. Keeping every murderer alive cheapens human life because it belittles murder. That's easily proven. Imagine that the punishment for murder were the same as the punishment for driving over the speed limit. Wouldn't that belittle murder and thereby cheapen human life? Of course, it would. Society teaches how bad an action is by the punishment it metes out.

And what about the pain inflicted on the loved ones of those murdered? For most people, their suffering is immeasurably increased knowing that the person who murdered their family member or friend – and who, in many cases, inflicted unimaginable terror on that person – is alive and being cared for.

Of course, putting the murderer to death doesn't bring back their loved one, but it sure does provide some sense of justice. That's why Dr. Petit, a physician whose life is devoted to saving

lives, wants the murderers of his wife and daughters put to death. In his words, death “is really the only true just punishment for certain heinous and depraved murders.” Is the doctor wrong? Is he immoral? Well, if you think capital punishment is immoral, then Dr. Petit is immoral.

And what about opponents’ argument that an innocent person may be executed? This argument may be sincerely held, but it’s not honest. Why? Because opponents of capital punishment oppose the death penalty even when there is absolute proof of the murderer’s guilt. If there were a video of a man burning a family alive, opponents of capital punishment would still oppose taking that man’s life.

Moreover, by keeping every murderer alive, many MORE people are murdered other prisoners, guards and people outside of prison in case of escape or early release – than the infinitesimally small number of people who might be wrongly executed. And now, with DNA testing and other advanced forensic tools, it is virtually impossible to execute an innocent person.

Then there is the argument offered by some people in the name of religion that only God has the right to take human life. I always wonder what religion these people are referring to, since the holiest book of no religion of which I am aware ever made that claim. People just made that argument up.

So, if you’re on the proverbial fence on this issue, please ask yourself this question: Do you really believe that the torturers, rapists, murderers of Dr. William Petit’s wife and daughters, and evil men like them, deserve to keep their lives?

If you’re like most people, your answer is no. Your heart, your mind, your whole being cries out for some justice and fairness in this world. But, if you really do believe these people deserve to keep their lives, well... as I said at the outset, I don’t understand you.

I’m Dennis Prager.